

SBIT INTERVIEW FOR EUNGELLA RURAL FIREBRIGADE WITH MRS VAL LOWRY.

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Today's date is 9th May 2009.

Those present are Suellen Florer; Interviewer and Mrs. Val Lowry interviewee. The Subject we'll be discussing today is; Problems Eungella faced before the community had a Rural Fire Brigade.

Mrs. Lowry before we discuss the subject can you tell me a little about yourself. Would you please state you and your husband's full name and address?

Ah yes my husband's name is Cecil Charles Lowery and I'm Valery Lowery and the address,... really, is Sonnyboy Creek Road that's where we live.

Thank you.

How long have you lived in Eungella?

We came here in 71...we've been here thirty eight years.

And prior to living in Eungella, where did you live?

Ah mostly in the far South West of Queensland around Cunnamulla, Charleville, Quilpie.... and on sheep stations.

What occupation did you and your husband have there?

Ah he always managed sheep and cattle stations.

What occupation did you take up when you first came to Eungella?

Well we bought a school bus run, which went to Bee Creek, Schumanns Road and Crediton.

And that must have been quite a feat those days?

Yes because the roads weren't sealed, just a little bit of bitumen in Eungella township itself; from the school out to Crediton in the wet season was very very, slippery. In fact some times you just couldn't drive over them, either the milk-tanker or the school bus.

I believe you had a riding school as well?

Yes when we came up we had a thirty-two foot semi- trailer and we had our nine stock horses with us and they just sort of ran free here and all the local children learnt to ride. On the week-ends, we did hire out; we did get a lot of people wanting to ride, and wanting to learn to ride.

I guess prices then were much different from today?

Yes – yes we use to charge a dollar an hour and it is was quite popular with the young people in particular coming up here wanting to learn to ride.

What difficulties did you face when you first came to live in Eungella?

Ah yes well the roads in particular were really bad; that's why the man who owned the bus run desperately wanted to get rid of it as he was getting on in years.; but when people saw how bad the roads were they lost interest. We though were use to rough and hazardous roads from living out west, so we didn't think they were too bad really; but the roads were a problem. Sometimes, we couldn't get over them at all; we would have to break up the bus run and pick up children one way or another; especially at Credition over the plateau could be quite impassable. It was all red soil and you couldn't negotiate it at all.

And not having a local fire brigade did that cause problems?

Ah yes, yes it did. Though there was a lot of rainfall in those days, so there wasn't a lot of undergrowth to catch alight ; but housing, of course there were houses that burnt down. There was no help available at all...they would be gone in a short time, even the neighbours would try helping, but there was nothing organized.

It would be a horrible feeling I suppose?

Yes, Yes it would, when Ces Burges's house burnt, that's the one that's very high up in the hills; ([Ed.] it overlooks Sonny Boy Creek;) it's where Kerrs live now, it was, yes it was terrible you could just here these explosions, it was the fibro, and they just got out, it was an elderly couple, and the just got out in time.

Goodness. So those were some of the fires that happened here. I believe a house that you once lived in, after you sold it, that, one caught fire as well. Is that correct?

Yes, about six months after we sold it... it was right in the township of Eungella. The poor people it was a little bit of carelessness probably. She had just cleaned her nails, and she dropped a cigarette into the rubbish bin. They had just got to bed, and the next thing the post mistress rang us to say what had happened and when we looked up into the night sky all you could see was the red glow; and there was nothing, nothing anyone could do. Fortunately they escaped with their children.

It must have been terribly frightening for everybody not to have a fire-brigade on hand then?

That's true, of course they would try to get everybody in the valley to help, but of course it took so long to get here the fires would be burnt out. There was one fire engine in Finch Hatton that would come up but ... no..um everybody knew it was pointless.

Can you remember the address of the affected properties?

Ah yes that was on the high road that over looks Eungella where Sharee and David Kerr live now.

Right... and the property that you owned?

Yes I think that is known as Cummings Street. I think that's what they call it now.. Yes .. You see there were no streets in those days. Yes it's right in Eungella and those times there were two houses very close to it. The people that lived there were trying to throw water on the sides of their houses trying to stop them from going up in flames too, because it was touch and go.

Oh goodness. That's the property that Viv and Warren Smith bought a little while ago I believe, and it's just changed hand again now... yes that's the Cummings St. one and before Warren and Vivean , I believe a gentlemen by the name of Patrick lived there?

Yes that's right, that was our house... and that's where he rebuilt where our house use to be.

Mmm Interesting. I believe you were a member of S.E.S. Were you a member of fire brigade as well?

No just the S.E.S. at that time that came first and they did really contribute to the community a lot in those days. They were just locals, they were just like most of the men...they were very capable. I can remember looking for lost people... and finding them.

Oh how wonderful.

Yes....

So... The S.E.S. was first; then came the fire brigade...but you say you personally weren't a member of the fire brigade; but were you present at the brigade's opening?

Yes...Yes we were it was a very memorable day for Eungella. Yes it was.

So can you tell me some memories from the day?

Yes well I suppose as the day got closer, we realized it was really going to happen, because we all doubted it... we said especially the Governor General coming we thought that was all a joke. Nobody believed it; except those involved. Oh yes they'd say this really would happen. A lot of people turned up and it wasn't raining, and he was the most easy person to talk to, a really likeable man, and he mixed so well with the locals. Yes it was a very memorable day.

It must have been a really big day for Eungella all round?

Yes...yes it was.

Well thank you Mrs. Lowery, for your time as an interviewee in Eungella's step back in time project.

Thank you.